



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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04 March 2005

**SCG43393.E**

Serbia and Montenegro: Information on societal attitudes and the availability of protection to Roma (January 2003-February 2005)

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### Societal Attitudes

Several sources indicated that Romani populations are socially marginalized and subject to discrimination (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005; *Le Courrier des Balkans* 28 Feb. 2005; ERRC 22 March 2004; *ibid.* 31 March 2004; Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia Oct. 2004; Transitions Online 19 Aug. 2004; UNDP 2005).

In February 2003, Inter Press Service (IPS) reported on the persistence of negative stereotypes about Roma (26 Feb. 2003). According to IPS, a survey had found that "79.5 per cent of Serbs would not marry a Roma, 68 per cent thought Roma were lazy and irresponsible, while 57 per cent said Roma could not be trusted" (*ibid.*). However, a BBC article reported that research conducted in Serbia had found that the attitudes towards Roma had improved in 2003 (16 Dec. 2003).

In 2004, three human rights groups in Serbia and Montenegro expressed concerns about the publication in a Serbian newspaper of a racist joke that targeted Roma and suggested that "killing Roma is a legitimate activity" (ERRC 22 March 2004; *ibid.* 29 July 2004). A Belgrade radio report mentioned the existence of graffiti representing negative stereotypes about Roma (Belgrade Radio B92 7 May 2004) and posters "warning them not to leave their home" (Belgrade Tanjug 5 May 2004), while other sources indicated that displaced Roma populations in Kosovo were afraid of intimidation and violence if they ventured out of their enclaves (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005; *Montreal Gazette* 24 May 2003.).

A BBC article cited a lawyer from the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) as stating that "Roma are the most endangered ethnic minority in Serbia. They are the most frequent victims of discrimination and torture, both by the police and the people" (28 Oct. 2003). Another article, citing a report from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, indicated that "the attitude towards the Roma population probably illustrates best the atmosphere of intolerance (racism)" (Belgrade Tanjug 22 April 2003).

Sources indicated that displaced minorities in Kosovo, including Roma, had difficulty accessing healthcare, education and employment (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005; Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia Oct. 2004; Transitions Online 19 Aug. 2004; UNHCR Aug. 2004). For more information on access to health services, education, employment and social services by Roma, please refer to SCG43392.E of 2 March 2005.

Sources reported that Roma were also victims of prejudice in Montenegro (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005; UK April 2004).

### Security

*Country Reports 2004* described the riots that took place in Kosovo in March 2004 as "the most serious outburst of violence and destruction since the 1999 conflict" (28 Feb. 2004). In its *World Report 2005*, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that these events had left "[21] people dead, more than 950 wounded, and some 4,100 people displaced, almost all of them Serbs, Roma, Ashkali or other non-Albanian minorities" (13 Jan 2005).

Sources reported that ethnic violence continued in Kosovo (AI 18 March 2004; *Le Courrier des Balkans* 28 Feb. 2005) and that minority groups, including Roma, were the targets of various forms of human rights violations, including the destruction of their houses, killings, physical attacks and harassment by members of non-governmental racist groups (Belgrade Radio B92 7 May 2004; Belgrade Tanjug 5 May 2004; ERRC 31 March 2004; HRW July 2004).

In a position paper issued in August 2004, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that "forced returns [of minorities, including Kosovo Roma] to Serbia and Montenegro (excluding Kosovo) on the basis of the internal flight or relocation alternative contradict[ed] the spirit of the UN Security Council resolution 1244, which refers to the safe and unimpeded return of all refugees and internally displaced persons to their home" (August 2004).

### **International and Domestic Laws**

For information on international and domestic laws related to minorities in Serbia and Montenegro, please refer to SCG 43312.E of 3 March 2005.

### **Treatment of Roma by the Police**

Several sources reported that minorities had complained about the lack of protection from, or unfair treatment received by, security forces (AI 3 March 2004; Belgrade Tanjug 5 May 2004; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005; Freedom House 15 Sept. 2004; *Montreal Gazette* 24 May 2003). *Country Reports 2004* mentioned that "police often did not investigate cases of societal violence against Roma" (28 Feb. 2005; see also AI 3 March 2004, Sec. 4).

Other sources raised questions around the role (*International Herald Tribune* 12 Jan. 2005) and capacity of both the police forces put in place by the United Nations Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and of state authorities to bring to justice those responsible for human rights abuses and violations (AI 18 March 2004; HRW 13 Jan. 2005).

### **New Initiatives to Combat Discrimination**

A BBC article reported that the Serbian prime minister had acknowledged that human rights violations of Roma are an issue of significant concern in Serbia (2 Feb. 2005).

On 2 February 2005, government leaders from eight central and southeastern European countries, including Serbia and Montenegro, gathered in Sofia, Bulgaria, to launch the "Decade of Roma Inclusion" (World Bank 2 Feb. 2005). Developed with the financial assistance of international donors, this initiative seeks to combat discrimination against Europe's Roma (ibid.). National action plans will be developed to address priority issues (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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**Internet sites, including** : European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Minority Rights Group International.

